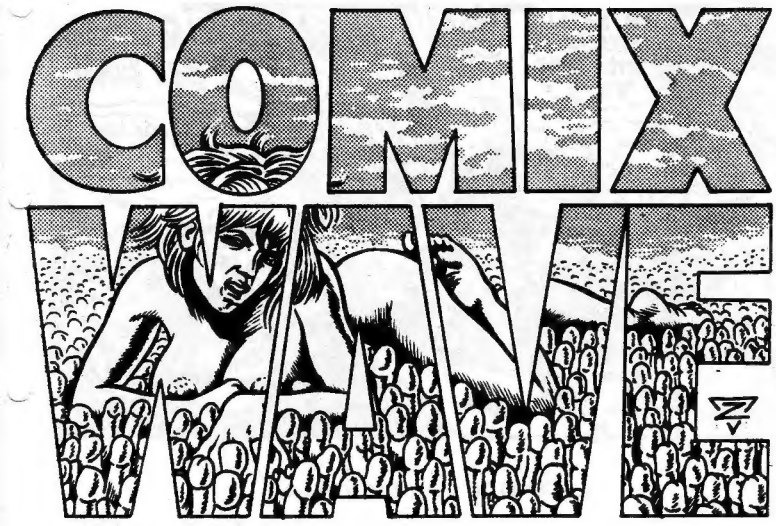

PETER RABBIT II

Beatrix Potter of England named Peter Rabbit when she found him in Mr. McGregor's garden. With fascinating text and talented brush she made a classic of the event in the delightful little volume children everywhere know and love. I believe they always will. When I began writing stories for my own small boy, a rabbit was already Peter and there was no changing the name. I like to think that Miss Potter gave Peter a name known the world over, while I with Mr. Cady's help perhaps made him a character.

—THORNTON WALDO BURGESS
NOW I REMEMBER

Comics people are more likely to associate Peter Rabbit with Harrison Cady than with Thornton W. Burgess, but it was the self-taught naturalist and ex-bookkeeper who started telling stories about Peter Rabbit and Reddy Fox and a gang of other woodland creatures back in the Fall of 1910. The column was basically an imitation of the Bedtime Stories of Howard R. Garis which Burgess had seen in the papers earlier that year. The first Uncle Wiggily story came out on January 30, 1910. The Uncle Remus stories date back to 18~8 and there were ten books by Joel Chandler Harris in 1910. These three writers are closely related by the material they used. They were also journalists, men who made their living as writers, and they all stayed pretty close to home most of their lives. Harris was shy and terrified of speaking in public. Garis loved the public eye and read his Uncle Wiggily stories to large audiences. Burgess was kind of in-between. He preferred to go out on a field trip and observe birds or other wildlife than to spend his time on the lecture circuit. Harris thought of himself as a folklorist and tried to get his stories down just the way he heard them from black people. Garis was strictly a storyteller. He made up whatever he thought would entertain. Never worried about aping the natural behavior of his hare or any of the other animals. But Burgess, like Beatrix Potter, was always careful to maintain the natural habits and habitat of his characters and would never write about them doing what they would not naturally do. That they wore clothing was simply conventional by 1910, a carryover from Victorian children's stories. Frederick Church, who illustrated the first edition of UNCLE REMUS, HIS SONGS AND SAYINGS (1880) did not dress Brer Rabbit or any of the other animals, but Arthur Burdette Scott who took over with the second edition, put some clothes on Brer Rabbit and subsequent editions followed suit. Burgess didn't get too involved with what his characters wore, leaving that up to his illustrator most of the time. The clothing DOES tell you certain things. It shows that Brer Rabbit was country, while Peter Rabbit was city and middle-class (his vest and bowtie).

Thornton Burgess was extremely popular and well-known when I was growing up. There were 20 volumes of his stories in books and I can't imagine anyone not having one or two of them around the house. Burgess was born on January 14, 18~4 in Cape Cod. His father died when he was 9 months old. His mother was an orphan, a semi-invalid. Thornton was raised by Charles Waterman, a factory clerk. He had to work hard all through his childhood and had no time for play. He made it through Sandwich High School, graduating in 1891 in a class of 9. He lived in Somerville, a suburb of Boston, and commuted. His first main job was keeping books in a shoe store. He hated that and selling shoes. Saw an ad in BRAINS and that got him into writing ad booklets in verse. He sold his first children's stories to the SPRINGFIELD HOMESTEAD ILLUSTRATED WEEKLY. Before long, he was on the staff of GOOD HOUSEKEEPING. His first book was THE BRIDE'S PRIMER. He married Nina Osborne in the Summer of 1905 and she died in childbirth in 1906. OLD MOTHER WEST WIND (Fall, 1910, the first of the series) was written for Burgess's small motherless son. Second wife was Fannie Johnson. They had 2 sons. Were together for 39 years until she died in 1950. Burgess lived until 1965. He was 91 when he finally gave it up.

Burgess thought of his stories as entertainment, but his research into animal life was always meticulous, mainly because he thought of himself as an amateur naturalist. His writing made him more famous than any other naturalist, pro or amateur, so he was always sensitive about any error that might find its way into the trials and tribulations of Peter Rabbit and Reddy Fox and Jimmy Chuck. Hence the entertaining veneer of his stories really covered up a good education into animal life. Burgess's stories always had a moral. Garis put one in, too, but his was always satirical, while Burgess was sincere. While people had begun to reject adult stories with morals (due to the popularity of young writers like Jack London perhaps), they continued to expect them to be attached to children's stories. Burgess succeeded with kids, because he knew that "no child will admit that any animal knows more than he does. And this is especially true in regard to the smaller animals. Much as the adult looks down to the level of the child, the child in turn looks down to the level of the squirrel and the rabbit."

"The story that humanizes the animal to the point of the impossible is bound to fail in its purpose from an educational standpoint."

"It is permissible for Peter Rabbit to talk because the child understands that in all probability there is some form of communication between animals. But it is not permissible for Peter Rabbit to climb a tree or to ride a bicycle. Kids know it's false and the lesson is lost." Well, Garis and Burgess certainly don't agree here, because Uncle Wiggily drives a car and goes ice-skating and skiing.

Nor would Burgess have approved of Harris. "Stark tragedy has no place and at all times is to be avoided in stories for little children." Et tu, Waldo. Then fall the naturalist, because more animals do not live for more than a couple of seasons. Potter's Peter Rabbit (her real pet) lived 9 years in captivity, but would have been lucky to make it through two in the wild. Burgess would not have approved of Felix Salten's BAMBI (1926). OUTLOOK once did a satirical article on Burgess reconstructed nature entitled: "When Does Old Man Coyote Eat?" Predators don't make out too well in Burgess or Disney. The owl never catches the field mouse or the chipmunk and the forest in SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS is lacking in all the predatory animals that would be there.

Burgess' little world of peaceful animals is often similar to that of Harris, probably because he borrowed some of those borrowed African and Indian folktales and restyled them for Peter Rabbit. Both Harris and Burgess tell versions of the way the rabbit got his short tail and long ears.

Peter Rabbit split into several different characters as time passed. Bea Potter's books were out there along with the Burgess Mother West Wind series. Harrison Cady adapted a lot of the material into a newspaper strip, making Peter into a middle-class Dad with a couple of kids, hence parting company with Burgess. Nothing natural about that behavior. Hares do not stay with the young at all. If anything, the female has to protect the babies, because the male is likely to eat them. Hares compete, fight, mate, and run off in search of food to feed themselves, while the pregnant females nest and raise the young. Cady did what most cartoonists do, dropped the natural animal behavior and projected human social life, people in animal costumes. The Peter Rabbit pages were reprinted in comic book form by Avon in the forties and Cady's assistant, Vincent Fago, continued the character of Peter in THE NEW ADVENTURES OF PETER RABBIT

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Logo by Joe Zabel. A sub to COMIX WAVE is $6 until October 1, then $7.50 a year. Postage goes to 25¢ per next year and all my other expenses have gone up. Listings in COMIX PLUGOLA cost two copies of your zine.* This issue is dedicated to the memory of Thornton W. Burgess. Coming attractions: coverage of the San Diego Con with photographs, the 20th anniversary of ZAP COMIX, and the lowdown on Snow White from Grimm to Disney. If you need a set of the early issues of COMIX WAVE (the first 53), send $20 to me and I'll mail you one, flat and ready to bind.

—CLAY GEERDES

in the fifties. It was probably the popularity of the Peter Rabbit strip that stimulated Carl **Laemmle** to suggest that Disney do a rabbit character in his cartoons for Universal, but Peter Rabbit was not the influence on Bugs Bunny. That character traces back to Max Hare from the Silly Symphony made by Disney in 1935 from Aesop's THE TORTOISE AND THE HARE, which dates back to 6th Century Greece where Aesop was said to be a clever slave who stayed alive by telling his fables.**Laemmle**'s suggestion reached Disney through his New York distributor and he did the Oswald The Lucky Rabbit cartoons in 192- and 1928. When he was out to renegotiate a new deal in 1928, he found out that Universal owned the name of the character, that they wouldn't give him any more money, they could just get someone else to animate Oswald, etc. They did. They hired Walter Lantz to do that in 1929. That experience left Walt fed up with rabbits; and with the inspiration and drawing talents of Ub Iwerks, he turned to a mouse that became Mickey, one who knocked Oswald out of the running, even after Lantz had worked a miracle and changed him from a little black rabbit into a cute white bunny. Oswald was one of the blandest characters ever to disgrace animation and if Lantz had not come up with Woody Woodpecker his place in the history of animation would have been less than a footnote.

As for the Peter Rabbit competition, there is no doubt that Bea Potter won. All of her books are still in print and widely circulated, while it is practically impossible to find a Burgess book, even in the used bookstores. People collect Cady art. You might find the comic books if you have the patience to look though all those funny animal boxes at a big convention, but don't count on it. Some dealers have them; they just don't sell many funny animal comics at a con, so they don't cart them around. The Fago NEW ADVENTURES OF PETER RABBIT is on a par with Oswald, lots of tired cliches with an occasional panel that is worth a chuckle.

Information on Burgess is from his autobiography, NOW I REMEMBER, published in 1960 in Boston by Little Brown and Company. Check it out. Read up. Get literate. C.G.

Art(c)1987 JR Williams

SYNDROME FOLLIES: We've had POOH PERPLEX, CINDERELLA COMPLEX, PETER PAN and SNOW WHITE syndromes, so we ought to know it all, huh? Lots of poppsych gold in them old fairy tales. Some of you armchair shrinks out there might want to climb on the bandwagon. How about THE RAPUNZEL SYNDROME? This one psychoanalyzes young women (usually blondes) who compulsively throw their hair out the window whenever a man (usually a prince) happens to ride by. If you're really bored with the endless re-runs of the KUKLA, FAWN, AND OLLIE show on t-v, why not knock out something like THE RUMPLE-STILTSKIN SYNDROME-little men who help women make lots of gold then get pissed off when the women won't marry them. THE JIMINY CRICKET SYNDROME--You have a compulsive desire to play conscience to a puppet. If on the other hand you're a blockhead who wants to be a real boy, you're afflicted with THE PINOCCHIO SYNDROME. Oh, you're a short ugly hunchbacked guy who keeps grabbing women and running up into the belltower with them? Obviously, you're manifesting the major symptom of the QUASIMODO SYNDROME (see Victor Hugo for diagnosis). If you start giggling, gushing, and wriggling your ass every time you put on a lot of make-up and a red dress, you're a likely candidate for THE MARILYN MONROE SYNDROME. And, hey, if you're a guy, well, you oughta watch that. So get with it. Don't let those New York Harvard/Yale shrinks make all the big bucks; get into the act with your own syndrome. -C.G./'87.

COMIX PLUGOLA

Latest COMIX WAVE minis: Bob Sheridan's PUNGX 4, 5, and MR. TECHNIQUE 2. WEIRD FETISH (an idea we had in 1978), featuring cover by R. K. Sloane and Jeff Gaither, interior panels by Tim Boxell, Bob Vojtko, Michael J. Becker (who was art director of the Berkeley BARB at this time), John Howard, and Ray Weiland. My minis are 50¢/stamp each and WEIRD FETISH requires an age statement (over 18). It's a good practice to include an age statement whenever you order ug, alternative, newave, or mini-comix, because some are x-rated. That car on this page is from a great story in the latest EL VIBORA (#87). This Spanish ug mag is the size of HEAVY METAL and sells through the mail for about $7 pp. Write to J. M. Berengueur, Plaza Beatas 3, Barcelona, Spain. Send $2 for latest catalog which shows a lot of the covers.* Bay area people: There is a new comic story on University in Berkeley, COMIC RELIEF. Ugs, B/Ws, minis, golden age, Marvels, check it out.* THE UNPUBLISHED ADVENTURES OF MERF 'N EEDLE is $1 from Scott Nickel, 921½ Crestwood Terrace, L A, CA 90042. DZ.* ZABAWNY 7 is 25¢/stamp from POB 3433, Merchandise Mart, Chicago, IL 60654.* THE BLACK CROSSES is 40¢/stamp from Renee Maciejewski, 3312 Fortunes Ridge Road, Midlothian, VA 23113.* TED 3, and 4 ($2pp for both), 3-27 Bold St., Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8P IT3.* UNDERGROUND SURREALIST MAGAZINE #1 is $2/.73 post from Mick Cusimano, POB 2565, Cambridge, MA 02238. Mick runs his rejection slips, so if you haven't seen all those subtle editorial comments...* RAT FINK COMIX is $2.50 pp from Starhead, POB 30044, Seattle, WA 98103 (see panel, top right).* SAN DIEGO COMICON is August 6-9. Info from POB 17066, San Diego 92117. See you there.* CEREBUS up to #97. Dave's going to hit 100 yet!* From COMICO, JOHNNY QUEST'S CLASSICS 1 by Doug Wildey.* A UFO story in THE SILENT INVASION 7 from Renegade Press.* WAXTOMCAT 1 and numerous other minis from William Dockery. 50¢/stamp each. Ask for list. 3226 River Ave., Columbus, GA 31904.* IDIOT SOLVENT 2/ 50¢/stamp, Paul Wilson, 3814 Oates Ave., Columbus 31904.* LUGUBRIOUS LAUGHS 6 is $1 pp from Frank Young, 1112 S. Magnolia Dr., V-203, Tallahassee, FLA 32301. Back issues available.* Tom Watkins X-RAY is $1 pp from POB 1159, Wilmington, DE 19899. It's free if you're in his neighborhood. Nice mag. 8½x11, 24 pp.* If you never get all the best editorial cartoons, you need the weekly tab, SANTA CRUZ COMIC NEWS. $12 a year from POB 8543, Santa Cruz, CA 95061. The best of Conrad, Toles, Gary Larson.* Congrats to Berke Breathed. His BLOOM COUNTY took the 1987 Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning.*